

Donovan Tells of Role In Freeing of Powers

FOIAb3b

NEW YORK, Feb. 12 (AP).—In the nuclear-missile cold war, Brooklyn lawyer James Britt Donovan played an old-fashioned undercover role to free U-2 Pilot Francis Gary Powers.

Resembling the romantic notion of an operative only in his piercing pale blue eyes, the 45-year-old Mr. Donovan told about his mission last night on his return home.

He had set the stage for his drama five years ago, as court-appointed defense counsel for Col. Rudolf Abel. He had argued then against the death sentence, saying the Soviet master spy might be useful at some time in the future—for just such a trade as was consummated Saturday on the Gleinecker Bridge between West Berlin and Potsdam.

That opportunity appeared shortly after Mr. Powers' trial in 1960. Mr. Donovan said Mrs. Able and her East German lawyer, Wolfgang Vogel, wrote him. He contacted the United States State Department, and last month was asked to negotiate, he said.

Leaving New York as a lawyer on business in London, Mr. Donovan slipped into West Berlin—after having arranged a cable to his wife and four children saying that he was going from London to Scotland.

Daily Trips East

For 10 days, he said, he lived alone in a house in West Berlin which he identified only as owned by friends—and made daily trips through the Iron Curtain. In East Germany, he negotiated with Ivan Shishkin, second secretary of the Soviet Embassy; Mr. Vogel, who by this time also was acting as attorney for Frederic L. Pryor, an American student also freed in the trade, and others, unnamed.

Officially, Mr. Donovan said, he was not in West Berlin, so he had to use his own initiative to cross the Communist border—through four armed control points. He did so by brazenly demanding, in German, "Take me to your leader," on the first day.

And each day thereafter he repeated it with a little more conviction and a little more authority, he said.

Saturday morning at 8 a. m., Mr. Donovan stood on the Western side of the bridge, facing Mr. Shishkin on the Eastern side. With Mr. Donovan as the United States official, Mr. Shishkin and a former associate, Capt. Kovalev, whom he said was a Soviet

—to identify the pilot. Two Soviet officials were with Mr. Shishkin.

Awaited Word of Pryor

Five yards behind each party flanked by two guards apiece stood Mr. Powers and Col. Abel.

"After Shishkin and I agreed the formalities had been complied with, one of our men came forward and identified Powers, and one of theirs identified Abel," Mr. Donovan said.

"We withheld action until we were notified that Pryor had been released by the East German government . . . far distant from the bridge. This took possibly 15 minutes."

Until the word came and the two prisoners crossed the bridge, Mr. Donovan added, "because the matter concerned three governments, I kept my fingers crossed."

COPYRIGHT